

SPLINTERS

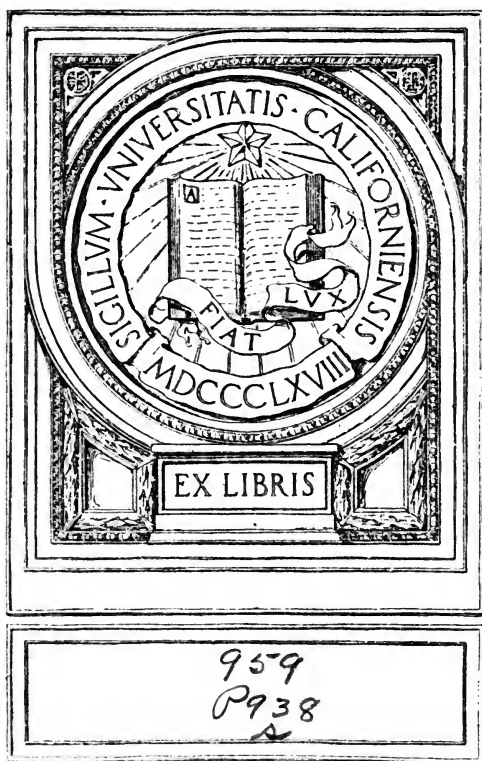


Keith Preston

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SPLINTERS

KEITH PRESTON

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BY

KEITH PRESTON



NEW

YORK

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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SPLINTERS

Splinters

Know that our jeers and our applause
Are subject to unchanging laws;
Dear reader, not by hit or miss
Do we impart the mitt or hiss.
Rapt eyes we raise to the SUBLIME
Soaring apart from age or time,
But, when that monomaniac
Genius, assays an airy tack,
Slips by the wing and falls,—poor cuss!—
Plumb down to the RIDICULOUS,
Do we give way to silent tears?
No, sir, we sprint for souvenirs.
Where genius crashes down to earth
We pluck a splinter, sir, of mirth.

Advertisement

I wrote vers libre at fever heat:
I never could make both ends meet.
I fell to rhyming, with dispatch,
And easily made both ends match.

So I am happy to report
Some fine remainders, long and short,
Odd sizes, for poetic freaks,

ALL BROKEN LINES.

BIG SALE.

TWO WEEKS!

Warm Babies

Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego,
Walked in the furnace to an' fro,
Hay foot, straw foot, fro an' to,
An' the flame an' the smoke flared up the flue.
Nebuchadnezzar he listen some,
An' he hear 'em talk, an' he say "How come?"
An' he hear 'em walk, an' he say "How so?
Them babes wuz hawg tied an hour ago!"
Then Shadrach call, in an uppity way:
"A little more heat or we ain' gwine stay!"
An' Meshach bawl, so dat furnace shake:
"Lanlawd, heat! fo' de good Lawd's sake!"
Abednego yell, wid a loud "Kerchoo!"
"Is you out to freeze us, y' great big Jew!"
Nebuchadnezzar, he rare an' ramp,
An' call to the janitor, "You big black scamp!
Shake dem clinkers an' spend dat coal!
I'll bake dem birds, ef I goes in de hole!"
He puts on de draf an' he shuts de door
So de furnace glow an' de chimbly roar.
Ol' Nebuchadnezzar, he smole a smile,
"Guess dat'll hold 'em," says he, "one while."

Then Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego
Walk on de hot coals to an' fro,
Gulp dem cinders like chicken meat
An' holler out for a mite more heat.
Ol' Nebuchadnezzar gives up the fight;
He opens dat door an' he bows perlite.
He shades his eyes from the glare infernal
An' says to Abednego, "Step out, Colonel."
An' he add, "Massa Shadrach, I hopes you all
Won' be huffy at me at all."

Then Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego,
Hay foot, straw foot, three in a row,
Stepped right smart from the oven door
Jes' as good as they wuz before,
An', far as Nebuchadnezzar could find,
Jes' as good as they wuz behind.

The Humorist

He must not laugh at his own wheeze:
A snuff box has no right to sneeze.

Red Books and Night Lights

Reading in bed as a fine art. The rules of the cult gleaned by a careful study of the best modern essays.

That reading in bed is a rite with a ritual,
Those couch-cognoscenti our essayists teach;
Ye novices, learn from us æsthetes habitual
The bed written rules that the essayists
preach.

Retire to your room with the paraphernalia,
Some hoary old volume, your brier and
pouch,
And garbing yourself in nocturnal regalia,
Then kindle the candle that stands by the
couch.

For bed books, no new books we essayists
handle;

For night lights, no bright lights are known
to the game—

A second-hand book by a flickering candle,
A tattered old tome by a tremulous flame.
We cling to the candle, so human, appealing;
It weeps as it works, shedding tallowy tears;

So second-hand books touch us readers of
feeling
With lachrymose thoughts of delectable
years.

How fondly we dandle in candle-lit darkness
Fair folios veiled in voluptuous vellum,
And thrill to the mad Latin grammar of Hark-
ness

Or rakish old Cæsar's wild Gallicum Bellum.
How dull and drab novels or newspaper
colyums!

Ye tyros, give ear to us urging instead
The old broken volumes, the vellum-bound
volumes,
The worm-eaten volumes we lug to our bed.

The Blazed Trail

When doubtful what to read it helps
To watch for William Lyon Phelps,
Blazoned along the fictive trail,
Blue blazes eloquent of Yale.

The Wallflowers

"Something there is that does not love a wall."

—Robert Frost.

You look out at me so sadly
Up against the wall behind you,
Little books that fare so badly
On the shelf where I consigned you:
Little books that came here hoping
I would trot you round a bit.
This reviewer left you moping,
For he did not find you fit.

I remember thee, thou fat one,
On the Czecho-Slovak nation,
Yes, I lamped thee, little flat one,
"Some Receipts for Conservation."
God of Hacks and Francis Hackett!
On my head a thousand curses!
If I look beyond the jacket
Of yon gushy, slushy verses.

Still, so piteous your showing,
In that limbo where I speed you,
Will you sit more happy knowing
That the New York Times will read you?

That the Times will boldly face you,
Size you up and never swerving,
Coram populo embrace you,
Even to the least deserving.

The Beloved Granger

(In the manner of Witter Bynner)

I

Shall I make hay
While the sun shines,
Or wait for it to rain
Pitchforks?

II

My mind is like a lightning rod
Erected to the pregnant clouds
Of inspiration.
Strike, happy thought, strike!
That I may run you
Into the ground.

The Wells Outline of History

Bare facts and experts void of art
Boosted bad boys like Bonaparte.
So we acclaim, in accents hearty,
This book less expert than ex parte.

Love Song

(In the Freudian manner)

Great Freud, inform my burning heart;
Instruct me how to woo!
Teach me, with psychopathic art,
To make my dreams come true.

He comes! Dear love, repressions fade.
Gone is my late neurosis;
My tongue has found, by Sigmund's aid,
The eloquent verbosis.

Love, lay thy phobias to rest,
Inhibit thy taboo!
We twain shall share, forever blest,
A complex built for two.

Ethel M. Dell

I love little Ethel,
Her books are so warm,
And though I don't need them,
They do me no harm.

Ye Truffler and Ye Trifler

Dear reader, when in sweet content,
You trifle with the succulent
 First fruits of current fiction,
Do you reward by any chance
Ye dumb reviewer with a glance
 Of careless benediction?

Think of the miles of sterile ground
He courses over, faithful hound,
 For literary truffles;
And leadeth you to luscious feed
This olde dogge Tray that may not read
 But only runs and snuffles.

The Smith-Premier Jazz

(In the manner of Vachel Lindsay)

Let the singer train the audience to chew like
stenos and to tap with their toes and click their
heels before he begins to lead them in the jazz.

Thus tapped the stenos:

“The quick brown fox— Here the
The quick brown fox— audience taps
The quick brown fox. . .” with the leader.

Brrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr

Brrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr. . .

And the Boss said to the Office Boy

“Go slow the stenos down!

Go slow the stenos down!!

Go slow the stenos down!!!

Go slow the stenos down!!!!”

And the Boy slowed the stenos down.

And the Boy slowed the stenos down.

And the Boy slowed the stenos down.

Brr r r r r r r r r

And the Boss came out of his den.

And the Boss came out of his den.

And the Boss came out of his den.

Willa Sibert Cather

Blithe Mencken he sat on his Baltimore stoop,
Singing, "Willa, git Willa! git Willa!"
The red-headed Lewis joined in with a whoop,
Singing, "Willa, read Willa! read Willa!"
They woke every bird from the Bronx to the
Loop
Singing "Willa, git Willa! git Willa!"
So we, willy nilly, got Willa and read
And Willa proved all that the booster birds
said.

Lit'ry Notes

There's A. the novelist that writes
Exclusively on rainy nights,
He tells his publisher:
And B. that can not pen a word
Without a bottle and a bird,
The lit'ry notes aver.

There's C. that keeps a pup or two,
And D. a tufted cockatoo
(He likes his study hot).
There's James that keeps his study cool
And lives austere (as a rule)
And Richard that does not!

There's Cyril writes with pencil merely
And gets poetic fancies queerly
From cats upon the roofs:
There's X who never learned to spell
But golly! how his novels sell!
(His chauffeur reads his proofs.)

All these quaint facts and more I learn,
On what makes lit'ry genius burn,

By publishers' dispatch.
I mostly keep 'em to myself;
But now I'm cleaning up my shelf,
I slip you a small batch.

Rural Delivery

(In the manner of Edwin Arlington Robinson)

He came a stranger to our town, old Ben,
And proved to be the friendliest of men,
Squeezing your hand and asking how you be,
Communicative to the last degree.

He liked to have you drop in at his place;
He catered to you with no common grace;
Nothing was hid away in drawer or shelf;
Ben always gave you all he had himself.

He cracked dry jokes the while he brewed
your tea,
With his infectious sort of revelry.
But then we found Ben's visitors begin
To drop off shortly after they dropped in.

We asked him, with no little deference,
Had he observed this strange coincidence?
Hoping it would not prove a social barrier,
Friend Ben allowed he was a typhoid carrier.

The Dotty Poets

We are no hand to mock or scoff,
But please expound to us
Why most free verses taper off
With dots in order thus . . .

We pay for poets by the word
And feel no little swindled . . .
To buy these polka dots absurd
With which their bull is brindled. . . .

Lai D'Orelay

Georgie Moorgie, pudding and pie,
Kissed the girls and made them cry.
But Mother Goose dared not to hint
What Georgie Moore would put in print.

Home Brewed Verse

All verses of domestic brew
 (You know the common recipe:
Sugar, a pound, or better two,
 A can of standard simile)—

All home-brewed verses, I repeat,
 Appear to poets potable,
And, barring undigested sweet,
 At times approach the quotable.

The spirit of this stuff is grand.
 It shows a laudable ferment.
But in each stanza, I see stand
 At least an inch of sentiment.

Heart Blobs

(In the manner of Edgar Guest)

Home ain't home till you can spot
By thumb prints on the wall
Just where each little tad and tot
Played up and down the hall.
Oh, take away your spotless towns
And marble halls, by cricky!
For home ain't home to him that frowns
Because the walls are sticky.

No, home ain't home without a tint
Above the cedar chest
To show where laddie's peppermint
Was forcibly impressed.
And home ain't home without a hint,
A blot, a blob, a splotch
That keeps for aye the golden glint
Of lassie's butter scotch.

If you would always have those spots
That home ain't home without,
Feed taffy to the little tots,
Let sorghum stand about!

For, folks, when all is done and said,
I say, with father feeling,
Home's home where happy kiddies spread
Molasses, floor to ceiling.

Walter de la Mare

The Georgian poets' hope is he,
Like a lone rocket fired at sea,
Spraying the night with gems to show
The sinking Georgian ship below.

Bee Lines

(In the manner of the Georgian Anthology)

Gardens seem archipelagoes to bees

With port o' call and spicy isle galore,
Where bees buzz in before a balmy breeze,

Or garden gusts blow bee barks battledore,
On poppy isles and many a beetling strand
Where bumble boats have heavy work to land.

No bee can tell what wealthy ventures wait

In these Moluccas small or Celebes
Between the garden hedge and garden gate.

Bees pay no arbor dues nor pilot fees.
Buccaneer bees all chart or compass lack;
So buzzing bee lines miss the busy track.

Song

(In the manner of Sara Teasdale)

Love, I do feel a nameless fear
I scarce dare breathe aloud,
Watching yon little withered moon,
Wrapped in her wisp of cloud:

For she may grow as when we met,
As opulent and bright,
But, love, when shall I be again
Full, as I was that night?

Poet Nurseries

"Does College make or unmake a poet?"

—The Vassar Quarterly.

Bring your pansy thoughts to college.
Profs will water 'em with knowledge.
Cool 'em off if overhot
With a patent sprinkling pot:
Pitter patter, Pope and Pater,
Petal pelting Alma Mater.

Girls, the world is cold and nips.
College comforts little slips:
Tucks a clever little quilt on,
Purple patches from John Milton,
Or a neat antimacassar,
Grannie Smith or Auntie Vassar.

Girlies, learn to concentrate
And eschew the social date:
Golden girls that woo the pen,
Shun the wiles of silly men!
Sport your oak to one and all:
"Prythee," say, "let no bird call!"

We Specialize

Most top-notch doctors grow too smart
To treat all comers à la carte
And start some tasty table d'hôte,
F'r instance,

“EYE, EAR, NOSE AND THROAT.”

So we, to show our class, from now
This fancy specialty avow,

“THE ESSAY, TRAVEL, POETRY.”

No fiction case at any fee—

(Of course, our sign is just for looks:
We keep good patients on our books.)

Repressions

(On the Freudian matter)

The desire of the yegg for a star,
Of the cop for a jimmy;
The desire of the dry for the bar,
Of the deacon to shimmy;
The desire of the fish for the fowl,
Of the fowl for the oven;
The desire of the mouse for the owl,
Of the fop for the sloven;
The desire of the wild for the tame,
Of the full for the void;
All these are the tricks of the game,
According to Freud.

The Eternal Conflict

City loafer, airy grin,
Guying Gopher Prairie, Minn.;
Gopher Prairie, cool, contrary,
Guying city loafer airy.

The Municipal Muse

(In the manner of Carl Sandburg)

I have heard the caroling of metropolises,
Deep calling to deep, wet to dry,
Montreal to Manhattan, Havana to Key

West calling,

“Yoo hoo, skinnay! c'mon over!”

I have heard them slinging slang,
Kidding one another, as it were,
St. Paul to Minneapolis calling,
“O Min!”

The Great Difficulty

Poet novelties fall flat
With the sky that same old plat,
Moon and stars so trite.
If the Lord has lit'ry feeling
He'll redecorate our ceiling
Some fine night.
With a sky that does not leak
And the lighting new and chic
(Indirect).
Art can take another lease
Upon life with an increase,
I expect.

Spilled Milk

(A real Swinburne, hitherto unpublished by us.)

Vain it is to wail over milk that's wasted:
Vain, alas, to sigh for what's spilled untasted:
Tears are all too feeble the fates to soften
For the pitcher gone to the pail too often.
Yea, futile quite is our lamentation
For the fearful crash and the inundation,
For the pitcher shattered and pint all slopping
As we stand and mope when we should be
mopping.

There are cows enow in the waving grain;
There are cans enow in the early train;
There are bottles plenty on dairy carts
And tidy tins in the busy marts.
But weep as I will I shall never drink
The pint that fell by the kitchen sink.

AE

A calm, green, lovely seagirt isle,
Worn mariners and Circe's smile,
Black spells—such antique witchery
Lies in that syllable AE.

But white thy magic, mystic sage,
Calm in a fistic day and age.

Wave on, AE, that wand, thy pen!
Shed calm and beauty on wild men.
So thy green isle in the Atlantic,
So gay, so fay, sometimes so frantic,
Erin, for magic spells but mild
The new AEAEA shall be styled.

To a Bottle of Vinegar

(In the manner of Pope)

Thou, old acetic, thou hast been one time
Stuff for the towering dithyrambic rhyme;
Flower of the grape, and her authentic blood,
Full tides of ferment fired thee at the flood.

Wise choice, and yet, I wonder, dost thou rue it,
To miss decanters and to hug the cruets?
Once chivalrous and southern and congenial,
To serve for humble kraut an office menial?

Seek not to mantle surly age with unction,
As salad days to view thy crabbed function,
Salad, in sooth! thou knowst not what it means,
Thou acid drench upon a mess of greens!

And yet, thy lot is rational and safe,
To live no hunted flask, no smuggled waif,
To bask in daylight on thy native heath
And keep thy bite although bereft of teeth.

Age may be sour, but who denies it sage?
Let giddy youth fling vain quixotic gage.
Short shrift await the wastrel and the quaffer!
More oil anoint thee, sharp and thrifty gaffer!

Advice to Poets

Speak roughly to your Pegasus
And beat him if he wheezes;
Real poetry is serious
And humors are diseases.

Too smart a pace requires the bit.
No quirt or quip let fall!
And if he puts his foot in wit
Your Pegasus will sprawl.

Arms and the Whistle

(In the manner of Dryden)

Those gods of old, a bit obeser,
Now masquerade as our police, sir;
Our crossway gods, with stars, blue suits,
And whistles for their attributes.
Tootlings, I sing, and tyrant nods
Of these my tootelary gods;
The good tin gods whose toot seraphic
Doth stem or start the teeming traffic.

What time I shrink, weighed down with
 packets

Where taxis swarm like yellow jackets,
Mid wains and tumbrils hurtling hellish
(How Homer could this scene embellish)
My deity, with whistle loud,
Transports me in a hollow crowd
As Homer's gods in cloudy pen
Cabined their Trojan fancy men.

The Lays of the Lands

"The Pawnees have lived so long exposed to the influence of the open country about the Platte river that their songs unconsciously take the shape of its long undulations."—Mrs. Mary Austin.

Manhattan bards, by tall skyscrapers,
Aspire in verse that towers and tapers.

Mex poets pop with fire and fettle
Provoked by Popocatepetl.

Swiss poems glide in glacial masses
With sundry metrical crevasses.

Bards on plateaus of high Tibet
Are platitudinous as yet.

Montana's muse is never mute
And every poem is a butte.

How simple, with a map at hand,
To learn the lays of every land!

The Poetry of Publishing

(After Herrick)

A sweet disorder in the press
Kindles in books a wantonness:
A jacket in some gaudy tone;
A binding rather loosely sewn;
A blurb or two that here and there
Bedeck the crimson stomacher;
An arch abandon boldly telling
In grammar, punctuation, spelling,
Do more bewitch me than when art
Is too precise in every part.

The Tempered Wind

The more I cast the careless quip,
The warmer thanks I learn to give
To editors who browse and clip,
Whose shears are long and sensitive.
Prick up your shears, good editor!
Prune and reprint the plumes of us!
The more his wings are clipped the more
Soars our exultant Pegasus.

Vitamine Verses

(Acknowledgments to "Vitamines," by Benjamin Harrow.)

Little Willie used to shine
Pitching on the village nine;
Suddenly, friends saw with anguish,
Willie's curves commenced to languish.

Every single hostile hitter
Landed hard on Willie's spitter;
Even dubs commenced to chop
Little Willie's famous drop.

Willie grew morose and thin;
Papa called the doctor in;
Told him Willie's pitching troubles,
How he had developed doubles.

"Doubles always incubate,"
Said the doctor, "at the plate.
What does little Willie eat?"
Papa answered, "Mostly meat."

"Meat!" this modern doctor shouted.
"Naturally his curves are clouted.

Heap the plate with cabbage chopped
And the bingles will be stopped."

Willie got the cabbage habit;
Now he takes it like a rabbit
And mows down the village nines,
Full of vim and vitamins.

Those Tight Little Styles

"Why, O why, has Mr. Untermeyer chosen to follow Heine in his tight little rhythms and mathematically cut stanzas?"—Miss Amy Lowell)

Ready to wear vers, modishly cut,
Heine could wear 'em, no one said "tut!"
Tight little stanzas fitted his parts,
Ready made rhythms, right from the marts.

Happy that Heine, easy to fit!
Supple of sinew, winsome of wit.
Oddly proportioned wits of today,
Ready to wear vers gives you away!

The Next War

Now that we know of Menckenite
And Nathanite (derived from it),
Disarmament seems only right;
Such weapons stagger human wit.

Three drops of Menckenite, they say,
Sprayed from a pen on any skin
Suffice a pachyderm to slay,
And authors' pelts are very thin

We must lay down our epithets
And Mencken might be willing to;
But there's a question that upsets:
What then would Stuart Sherman do?

Will Sherman drop his irony
And shall Fort Sumner be surrendered?
How hellish will the next war be—
Unless some compromise is tendered!

We offer this pacific tip:
If Mencken drops his Cabell line
And Sherman sinks his censor ship
The chance for peace will then be fine.

Cupid, M.D., Psycho-analyst

You wouldn't know Cupid, the beard he wears,
Pals with medics and apes their airs,
Swaps his arrows for doctor rigs,
A little black bag and some guinea pigs,
Keeps his poets and priests employed
Sorting dreams by the method Freud,
Guides long novels to horrid ends
With dope he cribs from his doctor friends.

Little Dan Cupid of story and jingle,
Why have you hung out this beastly shingle?
Don't you meddle with me or mine!
You horrible comic valentine!

Cupid, Cupid, if you don't mind,
Well we loved you when you played blind,
Toyed with arrows and doves and flames,
Didn't call things by their Latin names.
Fine, we liked you, when you began
As a chummy child that the bards called Dan.

Little Dan, Little Dan, little Dan C.
Cut out the medico-mummery.
Be our little old fashioned beau
With the frills and lace that we used to know.

The Casualty List

"Accuracy in description surely makes a catalogue sound like a hospital report."—*W. H. Allen, bookseller and wit of Walnut street, Philadelphia.*

Burns, R., loose, showing signs of wear;
Kreymborg, Alfred, unopened, rare;
Pope, Alexander, broken backed;
Morley, Christopher, gilt, joints cracked;
Wordsworth, William, in boards, needs tack-
ing;
Swinburne, Algernon, flyleaf lacking;
Whitman, Walt, loose, and leather rotted;
Dell, Floyd, mottled calf, somewhat spotted;
Horace, worm-eaten, water-stained;
Coverley, Roger de, cover strained;
Tennyson, banged a bit, mended with glue;
Lowell, Amy, uncut, as new.

Ode to Common Sense

Spirit or demon, Common Sense!
Seen seldom by us mortals dense,
Come, sprite, inform, inhabit me
And teach me art and poetry.

Teach me to chuckle, sly as you,
At gods that now I truckle to,
To doubt the New Republic's bent
And jeer each bookish Supplement.

Now, like a thief, you come and flit,
You call so seldom, Mother Wit!
Remember? Once when you stood by
I found a Dreiser novel dry.

One day when I was reading hard,—
What? Amy Lowell, godlike bard!—
You peeped and then at what you saw
Gave one Gargantuan guffaw.

Spirit or demon, coarse and rude,
(Sometimes I think you must be stewed)
Brute that you are, I love your powers,
But—drop in after office hours!

Yes, Common Sense, be mine, I ask,
But still respect my critic's task;
Molest me not when I'm employed
With psychics, sex, vers libre, or Freud.

The Gist of It

"The Colonization of North America, 1492-1783."
—Bolton and Marshall.

By dams that beavers engineered
And clearings French and Injuns cleared,
We sturdy Anglo-Saxons potted
The first inhabitants and squatted.

The Shears of Destiny

Those three fates of ancient fable,
With the volume on the table,
Sat and took their daily tolls,
As was written in the scrolls.
Sisters twain spun off the spindle,
Let your thread run off and dwindle;
When the dope said you were slipping,
Cruel Clotho did the clipping.

From these scissored sisters started
Clipping bureaus stony hearted,
Where the chits read on and snicker
At their damned diurnal ticker.
When some journalistic gink
Says your book is on the blink,
When the Post declares you slipping,
Cutie Clotho takes a clipping;
Snips and pastes your doom as stated
Hands you yours all stamped and dated.

Testimonial

"Send for it [the Encyclopedia of Etiquette] that you may know just what to do and say when you overturn a cup of coffee on your hostess' table linen. Send for it that you may know the proper way to remove fruit stones from your mouth."—Adv.

It used to rather get my goat,
In fact, I felt a perfect pup,
When I had wrecked the gravy boat
Or overturned my coffee cup.
But "Etiquette" is mine to-day,
And, like a gentleman of class,
I am most jocular, most gay,
When I have dumped my demi-tasse.

My fingers used to all be thumbs,
I blushed and inwardly I groaned
When served with olives, prunes or plums,
Or cherries negligently stoned.
But now, with "Etiquette" to groom
Me such is my temerity,
I flip the pits around the room
With debonair dexterity.

Gods and Machines

I looked at the gas tank, so paunchy and
squat—

Ah, has he a poem inside him or not?

I looked and I looked at this comical card

And wondered what copy he held for a bard.

I sniffed at the rich odoriferous air.

I groped for the poem I scented was there;

I sighed for our Sandburg to show me the key,

When, whew! the afflatus descended on me.

Prosaic? yon tank, set so firm on the ground?

Or earthy? this Titan, full bellied and round?

We see, Carl and I, O ye rabble myopic,

The heart of this hulk, how it throbs philan-
thropic.

Though blatant his look, what a beautiful soul!

How free with the gains that he squeezes from
coal.

How lavish of sweetness and light from his
gains,

Still serving the people with might and with
mains.

Ah yes, he illumines some millions of heaters,
While brass buttoned thousands are reading
his meters;

So generous he, with his brightness sidereal,
For me and for Carl he makes bully material.

For Carl and myself, if you know what I
mean,

Can vision the god where you see the machine.
But in justice to Carl I would have you divine
His gods are not nearly so gaseous as mine.

Please Go 'Way and Let Me Sleep

*"Psychoanalysis. Sleep and Dreams." By Andre
Tridon.*

Dreamland, in which I loved to stop,
To-day is Freudian and frowzy,
And yet inveterate I drop
Asleep when I am good and drowsy.
Those ports to which my ship of dreams
Scudded before a snoring gale,
Lighted by lurid Freudian beams,
Loom perilous and yet . . . I sail!
Though banned the dreamland I esteemed
And quarantined each port o' call,
'Tis better to have slept and dreamed
Than never to have slept at all.

Wanted—Inglorious Miltons

Everybody's busy at that critic game
Rolling little timbers to the Hall of Fame.
Why should I be idle? Upon my soul!
I want a little log of my own to roll.

I want to show my muscle and dexterity:
I want a log that's troublesome and slippery:
I want to take a tough one in my timber hooks
And shine as a Columbus in the Land of Books.

There's the Rub

You did not know
How wild ducks' wings
Itch at dawn . . .

—Lola Ridge

O didn't I just?
I did so! . . .
That's when sawbills
Come in handy. . . .

A Business Love Song

My love is formed with perfect art,
A standard size in every part;
O wonderful! the mother wit
That framed my love so fine to fit.

My love is very strong and bold;
His eyes are keen and icy cold;
So cool, so green, one would declare
Cucumber frames the specs they wear.

My love is business every inch,
His grip compelling as a winch;
He never wastes a move or word—
“Righto!” he crackles, or “Absurd!”

He’s asked me—he, my love, my Jim!—
To organize a home for him.
The deal is closed. Can such things be?
His love! Jim’s coefficient! Me!

Stars and Such

"Colored Stars" Fifty Asiatic Love Poems, E. Powel Mathers.

I

Such stars! My peering periscope
Saw 'em as plain as man could hope;
Full fifty nifty slants at Venus
With nary asterisk between us!

II

Such scents! As sybarite and seer
I swim in sultry atmosphere,
Where incense, oriental sandal,
Smothers the well known breath of scandal.

III

Such songs! How hot and dry I am
After that sizzler from Siam!
Believe me, boys! Beluchistan
Is no place for a modest man!

IV

Such hues! O henna-tinted flesh,
Gold ears, and locks of ebon mesh,
Soft topaz eyes, red fire of kisses!
Beware the betel chewing misses!

v

Barbaric? Here's a scorching Kurd
Makes poor old Whitman's yawp absurd,
And any Afghan blade of class
Has lays to wither Walt's green grass.

vi

Say! With this volume on his shelf
A guy can orient himself—
Touch off the incense and grow drunk
On burning poetry and punk.

Our Aim

Some sigh for gales of laughter;

Some whistle for a wheeze:

I merely aim to riffle

Your risibilities.

I like to prod the piffle

With which the press is full,

Or, like the banderillo,

Pin ribbons on the bull.

Ingratitude

There was a poet in our town,
A poet, sir, of parts,
Who had the rules of meter down,
And all poetic arts:
He clipped his verses long or short,
He did the rhymed or rhymeless sort,
But never drew a yelp.

The Chinaman Hop Lee, the same
Who did his shirts and collars,
Slipped him the tip that led to fame—
Those Ming dynasty scholars!
The learned birds that wrote such oodles
On tea, and concubines, and poodles,
And junks and jade and kelp.

Our bard was quick to take his queue
From generous Hop Lee,
The Mandarins and old Manchu,
And ideography.
He served them hot in fervid inks
These bird's nests from exalted Chinks,
Soup stock of poetry!

And now this poet in our town
Began to put on dog:
Yea! Even Braithwaite did bow down
Before the SINOLOGUE:
But did this pidgin poet show
A proper gratitude? O no!
He changed to a steam laundry.

Shoddy

We do not ban nor yet despise
The book that's merely merchandise,
The canny sleuth, the cowboy dapper,—
Just so the filler fits the wrapper!

Make merchandise, dear author, do!
An honest market waits for you;
But though you do not tempt the thinker,
Put wear in all the wares you tinker.

"God's Country"

("A story through which sweep the winds of terrible passions, 'where men bulk big'—a place of sinning and great deeds—of iron souls and iron fists; a new story of God's country."—Adv.)

It's bullets, booze, and buffets.

Beef, wine and iron men,

God's country where the boys run wild,

The beeves are in the pen.

What makes God's country such a mess?

Where do they get that stuff?

Whatever makes God's countrymen

So rowdy and so rough?

God's country wots not grammar;

The nouns are crude and raw;

The very verbs and adjectives

Obey no human law.

The sky above is monstrous blue

And high because (don't scoff!)

"Out there" the very clouds appear

To know the lid is off.

Sometimes it's in the Ozarks

Where ozone oozes wine.

Alaska and New Mexico
Are frightfully divine.
I know not if those purple heights
Are grazed by purple cows.
Would that be stranger than some sights
That God's domain allows?

The Sinister School

“There’s a sinister house,” said the bull on the
beat,
With an ominous eye, “upon Sinister Street;
To the sinister lure of this horrible lair
All the thrillingest authors and playwrights
repair;
On these premises dark in a year there were
done
Plays, novels, and stories, one thousand and
one.”

Einstein Made Wheezy

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are,
Up above the world so * * * dammit!
How did Einstein diagram it?

A Fable for Librarians

The keeper of the zoo, one day,
Decided to buy only hay.
"Since we must standardize," said he,
"Hay suits the big majority."

The bear was quite resentful but
The keeper of the zoo said "Tut!
Your taste, dear Bruin, does you proud,
But I must cater to the crowd."

The lion gave his bale one look;
His baleful roar the cages shook.
"Ooooh!" said the keeper of the zoo,
"Guess I must get a bone or two."

And so the lion got his grist;
The bear went on the waiting list;
The big majority still chew
About what Nature meant them to.

Effervescence and Evanescence

We've found this Scott Fitzgerald chap
A chipper charming child;
He's taught us how the flappers flap,
And why the whipper-snappers snap,
What makes the women wild.
But now he should make haste to trap
The ducats in his dipper.
The birds that put him on the map
Will shortly all begin to rap
And flop to something flipper.

Safety First

That serial I'm reading had me scared, it did!
The hero started speeding and looked sure to
skid;

The heroine seemed slipping (and she did,
almost)

But they can't get very naughty in the Sat.
Eve. Post.

Our hero turned the corner without spill or
shock;

The gal is no forlorn, thanks to good Saint
Bok!

So never never worry if they start to coast
For they never hit the bottom in the Sat. Eve.
Post.

It may look like a joy ride when the couple
starts,

But our author takes the safe side in the slippery
parts.

The ride will not be tippy though they tope
a tub

For the ale is never nippy at the Curtis Pub.

The Trend

"Let me have books about me that are fat."

—Julius Cæsar.

We have had volumes tall and fat;
Books by the prominent Red Hat,
The Admiral and Diplomat.

Great men can not write shortly.

The broader vision of the war,
(It's bound to broaden more and more)
Big Guns of greater girth and bore
Mean volumes still more portly.

Look in the Book and See

("Memories" by Lord Fisher)

Said the First Sea Lord to the Second Sea Lord
In Admiral Fisher's book—
It couldn't be true, so I rubbed my eyes
And I went for a second look—
But the thing was there, I will tell no lies;
It left me as pale as chalk,
And I said to myself, "When they're safe
aboard,
My land! How the Sea Lords talk!"

What the First Sea Lord to the Second said
I never, no never, can quote,
For I am a delicate, delicate man
As ever was sick afloat.
If you would know what the First Lord said
And the Second told the Cook,
Just look it up in the book I read
In the bold Lord Fisher's book.

Blue Stockings

To me there's always something shocking
About your unabashed blue stocking
Exposing to my sense alert
Subjects she might discreetly skirt.

Not that I much admire the knack
Of hiding what one should not lack.
But limbs or lore both shine, I guess,
Most fair when sheltered with address.

The Durable Bon Mot

When Whistler's strongest colors fade,
When inks and canvas rot,
Those jokes on Oscar Wilde he made
Will dog him unforget.

For gags still set the world agog
When fame begins to flag,
And, like the tail that wagged the dog,
The smart tale dogs the wag.

I Remember

I remember, I remember
The books I used to read,
Sweet Elsie and the Dinsmores
And Max and Viamede.
They seemed a stupid family,
But, curled upon my chair,
I learned the whole dam pedigree,
Because the books were there.

I read all Bulwer's novels through
And thought them very grand;
It was a silly thing to do,
But there they were at hand.
His heroes quoted Latin verse,
And people clapped to hear—
Which fact, for better or for worse,
Determined my career.

Webster seemed big and dry, that time,
And got my coldest shoulder.
Sizzled and misled used to rhyme
(My way with words was bolder).

I did not know a musketoon
From dirk or snickersnee;
A doubloon and an octoroon
Were common coin to me.

I remember, I remember,
(To wander back to Hood)
When words meant anything I chose
And sounded as I would.
'Tis then imagination glows
Ere yet, with fell annoy,
Shades of the dictionary close
About the growing boy.

The Parental Critic

We cannot bear to roast a book
Nor brutally attack it;
We lay it gently on our lap
And dust its little jacket.

On Meeting a Publisher

He picked me out from two or three
And chummed around a bit with me;
Yet something shy in words and looks
Showed I was scarce in his good books.

If I have judged the man aright
I was not in his good books quite,
And yet—he is a publisher—
So who knows what his good books were?

It would have been an indiscretion
To advertise his first impression;
He liked me—but he's waiting for
A couple of impressions more.

Reflections

(Upon reading recent criticisms of Mark Twain)

I

They say the Ouija and the Freudian flit
About the Courts where Wisdom dwelt and
Wit:

Mark Twain, our Laughter Lord!—the Sol-
emn Ass
Brays o'er his Head nor fears the Lash and
Bit.

II

Nowhere so thickly twine and densely spread
The Twaddle Vines as where some Genius bled;
Each Poppycock that Letters bring to Light
Wraps groping Roots around some Hero dead.

Low-Browed Rocks

Somehow we liked the old-time hush
Round Helicon and Hippocrene;
Those days the grasses seemed more lush,
The rills more bright and clean.
With the old fogies you may class us:
We don't like billboards on Parnassus.

Those days you heard the fountain gush
And saw the lizard on the rock,
Above you strayed the lark and thrush,
Below, the browsing flock.
With the old fogies you may class us:
We don't like billboards on Parnassus.

Now union painters ply the brush
And stencil those brown rocks with this:
"Try Someone's Literary Mush"—
"Brain Food You Must Not Miss."
The withered grasses lose their sap;
Papyrus is cut down to pap.
With the old fogies you must class us:
A bas the billboards on Parnassus!

The Second Growth

Little cedars, little larches

Where the old stumps rot.

Once this tangle was a forest,

When your seed was not—

Ere they swarmed, those lumberjacks

Bearing timber hooks and axe

For the war against the big sticks,

Little firs and tamaracks.

Have you heard it, little birches,

All the saga of the pine?

Tall and straight as Harald Fairhair

And his jarls in line,

Serried Norways, mile on mile,

And they felled them file on file,

Lopped their limbs away and dragged them

In a rough and ruthless style.

Now their dust is by the sawmills

That are toppling toward the lakes;

Creepers hide the rutted log roads

That no sledge now takes.

They were cut for beam or mast,
You will do for pulp at last—
 Striplings, upstarts, on the marches
Of the giants of the past.

When the Poetasters Tasted

"If you drink water, it's not a dithyramb."

—Epicharmus.

When a critic met a critic,
Tully tells us, he would wink:
When a poet met a poet,
He would order up a drink.
Yes, when Epicharmus flourished,
If a fellow was not wet,
He was non persona grata
In the dithyrambic set.

Now our critics and our rimers
Rarely wink and never buy.
They were rummies, those old timers!
We are glad the world is dry.
But I read a ream of verses,
And I swear they leave me cold.
They were piped, but they were pippins
In the piping times of old.

Pygmy Politics

Sifting old Homer's golden lore,
One page my eye detains,
How paltry pygmies fought of yore
With long-legged storks and cranes.
They battled storks, I know not why;
No more in fact did Homer;
Herodotus knew less than I,
The sly, mendacious roamer!
Those pygmies died; the loss was small,
But great the moral linked:
Peoples that fight the stork shall all
Become extinct.

The Appian Way

(Dedicated to our English visitors)

Epictetus came to Rome
Talking on his Grecian tome;
Lecturing about the Forum
Always drew an eager quorum.
Vestal virgins at his name
Banked the sacred fires and came:
Dames said, "Aren't you dear to treat us,
Darling Mr. Epictetus?"

BUT—

If one can safely trust
Scribes he gave occasion just
For a diatribe or two
By the things that he would do;
As, at Scipio's soirée,
Just to pass the time away,
Grabbing up the water clock,
Dumping it upon his block,
"Hoi polloi! You overheat us!"
Sputtered Mr. Epictetus.

Apuleius came to Rome
From a sunny Afric home

Telling club and study class
How he wrote his "Golden Ass."

BUT—

Though Vestals to a virgin
Seas of Roman matrons surgin'
Clapped the "Golden Ass" quite madly
Read in Latin broken (badly);
Though his periods were neat,
Showing his dactylic feet
Through lacunas in his sandals
Apuleius stirred up scandals.

SO—

They passed a LEX to bind
Literati all to mind
Every Roman p and q,
Do in Rome as Romans do;
To respect the Roman God
And be adequately shod.

WITH—

A mark like this to toe
Speakers gave a quid pro quo
And preserved the Roman PAX
'Twixt the rostra and the ax.

The Complete Cynic

Diogenes, that wise old bird,
Walked Main Street up and down,
To lamp, as doubtless you have heard,
Some honest man in town.

And whether he found any
Has been completely hid,
But as against a penny
I'll bet my wad he did.

He took their names and numbers down,
With many secret snickers.
Diogenes sold sucker lists
To Hellenistic slickers.

New Stars for Old

("This hundred inch mirror, which has just been installed at Mount Wilson observatory, California, will bring a hundred million new stars into the ken of man."—National Geographic Magazine.)

Still the charted heavens speak
Of the Arab and the Greek,
Kenned and conned as Hercules,
Altair, Vega, Antares,
Roman Leo's starry pelt,
Bold Orion's studded belt,
Crown of Ariadne, martyr,
Slow Boötes, dubbed the carter,
Classic labyrinths to lure us,
Lyra, Cygnus, and Arcturus,
Stately names, majestic, regal,
Roman Aquila, the eagle.

Let the old time heroes glisten!
Now, with little stars to christen,
Shall we doom their infant forces
To plug on in classic courses?
"Never!" Education cries,
"We must modernize the skies.

Yon twin stars, no time to lose,
Call 'em 'Charlie Chaplin's Shoes';
Yonder galaxy of pearls,
Call 'em 'Sennett's Bathing Girls.'
If you need a good name for a
Fixed star better call it Borah.
The more crowded starry zones
Shall be Smith and Brown and Jones."

Pygmalion

Pygmalion carved out of jade
A very slim translucent maid
And then, as artists do today,
Fell for his finished thought, they say.

With accents wild and manner flighty,
Tossing his arms to Aphrodite,
"O blessed Cyprian," he cried,
"Give me yon gem to be my bride!"

Lo! even as the air he clawed,
That shimmering creation thawed:
Down from the pedestal she leapt
As saucy jade as ever stept.

His ardent eyes he could not slake.
So womanly and so opaque!
He idolized her more, I guess,
For seeing through her rather less.

Rose pink she grew, that melting queen,
But in her eye still lurked some green;
Jealous, she made him take his pen
And contract ne'er to sculp again.

“Y’know, my angel Pyg,” said she,
“You love your own idea of me;
And if you mess around with jades,
You might imagine other maids.”

The Classics in a Nutshell

(Modern reader's library)

VERGIL'S *ÆNEID*

Æneas, with his little boy,
Slid down the fire escape from Troy.
He took the household bric-a-brac
He took his father pick-a-back.
His wife Creusa he forgot
(Although he loved her quite a lot).
She perished in the fire, poor dame!
He often thought of his old flame.

From Troy he sailed the raging tide, O!
To Carthage where he fell for Dido;
Then left her cold and went to hell
Came through and married very well.
No one had ever thought him bad,—
He was so sweet to his old dad.

Le Roi Est Mort. Vive le Roi!

Dead is Bacchus, God rest his soul!

Dead the catches we used to troll.

Dead the bottle and dry the bowl.

Ding-dong! Ding-dong!

Sound the bugle and roll the drum!

Hail King Coffee, your hour is come!

Wreathed with chicory, lads and lasses,

Toast our monarch in demitasses.

Roast him, toast him, sing a glee!

To this merry old bean out of Araby.

Bacchus II his name and style,

Merry monarch of Java's isle.

He shall liven the revel late;

He shall addle the poet's pate;

Rule the dances of nymph and satyr,

Bubbling lord of the percolator.

Brew his Mocha and quaffing hot,

Burble, bards, of the perkling pot.

Philosophy for Fish

I

Gather ye minnows while ye may,
Old time his net is plying.
The very fish that swims to-day
To-morrow may be frying.

II

Materialist as is the carp,
Fish sometimes think him rather sharp;
So tough his muddy browsings make him,
The gods above are loath to take him.

III

Preparing for a higher sphere,
The pollywog looks mortal queer,
But some day, fishes, this poor cuss
Will have it over all of us.

Cats

I do not think that I have seen
A man of so aloof a mien,
So hoity-toity and all that
As any ordinary cat.

Your cat will cotton come what hap
For lap and love to any chap,
But canny cats love cream and liver
More fondly than the foolish giver.

In poker, when some genius hatched
An institution cold, detached,
That takes with no return nor pity,
He called that article a kitty.

Tail-waving cats as Homer sings
Have viewed the tallest pomps of kings
But nothing has transpired to prove
That ever king a cat could move.

Foiling some canine's foul attack
A cat once arched her stately back.
An architect observed the pose;
So our triumphal arch arose.

Antarctic Fauna

(Versified from "South" by Sir Ernest Shackleton)

THE EMPEROR PENGUIN

This bird, in brains a bit subnormal,
In plumage is correct and formal;
So uniformed in fact this silly,
Some genius named him after Willy.

THE ROSS SEAL

The Ross seal lives on ends and odds,
On plankton or on amphipods;
But when these odds and ends grow wearing
He blows himself to flippered herring.

THE MODERN MARINER

That ancient mariner left word
The albatross was one mean bird,
Uncommonly vindictive;
How nice to hear this bird has chickings
Which makes uncommon tasty pickings
For parties not persnickative.

Big Time

Seeing strong men and acrobats
Do tiresome things upon soft mats
And get a call,
I wish a Samson could be had;
He brought the house down, too, that lad.
They felt it fall.

Bang it came down upon the beans
Of all the artless Philistines.
Some gore!
Yes sir! when Samson used to show,
And made a killing, there was no
Encore!

The Autocrat of the Nursing Bottle

*(To the dean of newspaper health oracles, Doctor
W. A. Evans.)*

He leadeth them by Pasteur's path,
Beside the biling waters;
He keepeth little sons from scath,
And eke the little daughters.

He knoweth milk and orange juice;
He maketh safe the nipple;
He fits the pap to the papoose,
And tippeth off the tippie.

So glory be to Evans, Doc,
That succoreth the suckling,
That chaseth colic from the flock,
And probes the puny duckling.

Beatus Ille

Oh, the early mail edition
As a news sheet hardly classes,
But how grand an education
Does it give the rustic masses!
Where a little later likely
Will appear some silly scandal,
See a deep botanic blurb on
Eucalyptus wood or sandal.
Where the city fellow lightly
Reads of graft and lower topics,
Happy Podunk learns the habits
Of the fauna in the tropics.
While the latest issue gives us
Rape or murder for our matins,
Ioway absorbs a method
For removing spots from satins.
O the happy happy farmers,
And the herdsmen and the millers,
Who suck wholesome information
From these elevating fillers.

Fed up as I am on gang loot,
Slander, sleuths, and politicians,
Me for some sweet R.F.D. route
And the early mail editions!

The Promoter

How wonderful this man who knows
That men astute and wise,
Purblind to moonshine such as glows
Before us poet guys,
That even most sagacious men
For hard-boiled judgments noted,
Will chase a star beyond their ken,
(If properly promoted.)

Who calls this man a grafter
Or jeers the stocks he bears?
He lifts the smoky rafters
And shows you golden stairs.
He points to mother lodes of tin
Or rocks with bismuth coated,
And proves that fairy ships come in
(If stocks can once be floated.)

He talks the Timbuc-Tulsa line
To where the gusher roars,
Or to the Onbeyonda mine—
(This poet never bores.)

To apple groves beyond compare,
Plantations dwarfing speech;
His mileage takes you anywhere
(That magic carpets reach.)

God bless this benefactor,
Whose poems never stale,
Who sells a birthright of romance
For rolls of common kale.
From sordid bonds relieved, you learn
To tread the rainbow track.
He guarantees a safe return.
(He always sets you back.)

It seems to me that poet norm
From Greece to Hindustan,
In time dopes out a native form
To touch the common man.
Our Vergils sing of golden gleams
In ads that ever please;
Each Yankee Milton ever dreams
Prospectuses like these.

The Arbitress

Do you remember, Central,
That time I called my wife?
You hooked me up with someone
Who's nothing in my life.
She's nothing in my life at all
And I am naught to her,
But yet, that fleeting moment,
Ye gods! how close we were.

It must be splendid, Central,
Yon web of life to make,
With threads of conversation
To cut and snarl and break.
Sometimes with kindness all divine
You give my prayers success;
Sometimes I piously resign,
"Well, She knows best, I guess."

The Good Old Summer Time

"The days grow ever warmer, sir."

Moloch remarked to Lucifer.

"Now heaven's windows open wide,
Shall not our graphophones be tried?"

"Well thought!" bold Satan cried, and
"Marry!"

"Our red-squeal records ought to carry.

Turn on that shrieking of the damned!

What joy to hear heaven's windows slammed!"

On Meeting a Poetess

Lady, I used to love your lines,
So warm, so wild, and so erotic,
Stealing my raptured sense away
Insidious as rare narcotic.

Lady, today our paths have crossed
And something, lady, has upset me;
No, not your fatal beauty; that
You had some time before you met me.

No, not the tortoise rims you wear,
The reticule that speaks the spinster,
Not just your suit, your hat, your air,
Though these would dignify Westminster.

My nerve the tout ensemble hit.
Well, in my time I've lost a few bets;
Who'd dream those tropic lines were writ
By one that looks so—Massachusetts?

Inquiry

Will you read these verses, neighbor,
Neighbor right across the court?
If you will, I'll save the labor
Of a separate report,
How your cracked piano carries
To my study in the eaves,
And I even hear you stumble
When you stop to turn the leaves;
How I love your "Soldiers Chorus"
Played with jazz and vim and pep;
(Though I feel a call to tell you
That the boys are out of step.)
How your "Old Black Joe" does thrill me,
As the French would say, to rave;
(Though you might just pedal lightly
On the poor old codger's grave.)
How "Sweet Afton" flowing nightly
Is the finest thing I know.
(Never was a dam constructed
Which could moderate that flow.)

Past, Present, Future

"Marquesans mark off the minutes by cigarettes, saying, 'I will do so-and-so in three cigarettes' or 'It is two cigarettes from my house to his.'—Frederick O'Brien.

Not clepsydrae where liquid time
 Tinkled in droplets down;
Not glasses where the arid hours
 Sifted in granules brown;
Not dials where the shadows creep
 As fingered gnomons beckon;
No ticking, whizzing, whirring clocks
 Tell time as poets reckon.

What but the ready cigarette
 Serves you in day or dark,
Showing the future as a glow,
 A moving, eating spark;—
The present as a pungent smoke,
 A whiff we may not stay;
The past a cold and pallid ash,
 Lightly to flick away.

Songs of the Season

The laying season first I praise
When hens are cackling roundelays,
And chanticleer, with loud eclat,
Proclaims his latest coop d'etat.
The fishing season next I prize
When piscatory anthems rise,
As merry anglers troll their catches
To reels a-humming little snatches.
The bathing time my chorus swells,
Told by the peeling of the belles,
With noisy costume to imbue,
"Wring out the old, wring in the new!"

The Pensive Pen

I wish I were the Hottentot,
Not polyglot nor pensive;
His native spot is nice and hot;
His wardrobe inextensive.
He never lacks a leafy cot,
Some coals on which his pot is sot,
A cache concealed in some cool grot
Of liquor for his nightly tot.
(That's strong but inexpensive.)
He pays his grocer scot and lot;
His guests get gratis what he's got;
All politics, says he, are rot;
He is not apprehensive.
So, polyglot and pensive, I
Admire the Hottentot,
Who lives where mercury is high
And other things are not.

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